

INFORMATION REPORT

COUNTRY Korea

CD NO.

25X1A

SUBJECT Disease Epidemics in North Korea

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1. Between 4 and 20 January 1951, an epidemic of contagious disease broke out in the areas south of Kaechon (125-54, 39-42)(ID 4998). An undetermined number of villages were quarantined by local authorities, and a restrictive cordon was decreed around certain villages where the entire population was affected. In late January it was not possible to secure hotel accommodations in the area. The disease was identified by North Korean health authorities as "eruptive typhus".*
2. By late January, unidentified contagious diseases had reached epidemic proportions in the North Korean towns of Sunchon (125-56, 39-25)(ID 5257), Sainjang (125-52, 39-14)(ID 4746), and Pyongyang. Areas less seriously affected included Sangwoi (126-06, 38-51)(BU 4801), Ful-li (126-16, 38-51)(BU 6301), Suan (126-22, 38-42)(BT 7186), and Singye (126-33, 38-29)(BT 8662). In mid-January it was rumored in Pyongyang that eruptive typhus was of epidemic proportions in the areas of Chungju (125-48, 38-52)(ID 4305), Hwangju (125-43, 38-40)(IC 4283), Sariwon (125-45, 38-30)(IC 4004), Chaeryong (125-37, 38-24)(IC 2853) and Anak (125-30, 38-30)(IC 1864).
3. No medical treatment was arranged by North Korean authorities in the Pyongyang area as of late January. Sanitation measures included the wholesale quarantining of entire villages or the separation of the healthy from the infected. In Pyongyang and Sariwon, wall posters were put up with the slogan "Kill the louse!"
4. In mid-February, Kangwon Province was heavily affected by an unidentified contagious disease. In the Pyonggang and Kumhwa (127-17, 38-17)(CY 6438) areas, 80 percent of the population was affected; at Chirwon (127-12, 38-15)(CT 4335) 60 percent, and at Hoeyang (127-37, 38-42)(CT 8084) 100 percent. This latter was one of the first villages in the province entered by the Chinese Communist forces. Children and young men appeared most seriously affected. Rumors were wide-spread in the area that once the Chinese Communists entered a locality, even though they departed immediately, residents would contract the disease, and the mortality rate of those infected is over 50 percent.

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5. In Sungba-ri (unlocated), Hukchon-riyon (127-07, 38-30)(CT 3663), a village of 30 families, most of the population were ill with an unidentified disease, and 16 persons had died by 20 February. In Kangwon Province, no medical facilities were available for the sick. Even in private hospitals no drugs were used.
6. Native Korean medicines were used when they could be found, but even these were daily becoming more difficult to obtain. One remedy which was rumored to be effective in a majority of the cases treated was a mixture of three garlic roots and three spoons of a Korean sweet grass called "dang cho" (唐草). If the patient broke out in red pimples like a rash, in about three hours after taking the medicine, there was an excellent chance for his recovery and he was considered out of danger. The rash generally spread over the entire body.
7. Although no general control measures had been instituted by the provincial authorities by the end of February, the village people's committees indicated the houses of the sick by stretching wire or rope around them. There was a rumor that some rightists in Kangwon and Pyonggang placed such ropes around their houses to keep out State Security Bureau investigators and soldiers but when it was discovered that the illness was only feigned they were tortured by the local authorities.

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[REDACTED] Comment: No description of the disease was given and the basis on which this diagnosis was made was not disclosed.

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